

BOOK REVIEW

Dervishes and Islam in Bosnia: Sufi Dimensions to the Formation of Bosnian Muslim Society

By INES AŠČERIĆ-TODD (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2015), xiii + 198 pp. Price HB €110.00. EAN 978-9004278219.

This book continues Brill's prestigious series 'The Ottoman Empire and its Heritage—Politics, Society and Economy'; its author holds a doctorate from the University of Oxford and currently teaches Arabic language and literature at the University of Edinburgh. On both counts, readers may expect well-documented and balanced argument properly fitted to established scholarship on the history and role of Sufi/dervish orders in Bosnia and the Balkans more widely: they will not be disappointed.

Dervishes and Islam in Bosnia has three major parts. The first looks, through the early stages of the Ottoman conquest and settlements of Bosnia, the establishment of urban centres, etc., at the Sufi contribution to this early development of 'Bosnian Muslim Society'. To a great extent the Sufis stood for a pacifying or revitalizing aspect of the conquest. Aščerić-Todd identifies the most remarkable dervishes of the time, recounts the construction of the first *tekkes* and hostels in Bosnia and explains their complex role.

The second part sets out how dervish-Sufi traditions permeated the life of the urban centres, their guilds, trades and crafts. The author examines in particular the role of *abis* (*alchis*), i.e. brotherhoods and dervish orders, in the economic development of guilds and in the shaping and maintenance of their religious character. She devotes much space to *futuwwa* and the documentary record of it (*fütüvvetnames*, *şecernames*, *pirnames*, etc.). She describes the hierarchical structure of the guilds, and the role of the guild elder or *Abi Baba*. She also provides interesting descriptions of the traditions of 'chivalric' trust on which relations between and within various guilds was based and which informed notions of virtuous or ethical business practice.

The third part, on the Hamzevi dervish order, reviews at length earlier research on the dilemmas surrounding the Hamzevis' true identity—were they an ordinary dervish order or a socio-political movement with Malami-Bayrami elements, etc? Together with the Introduction and Conclusion, these three parts of the book make up the outer framework of this valuable study. Let me now turn to the content within it.

Ines Aščerić-Todd works from a large number of primary documents (mainly in Turkish and Arabic), many studies in the local regional languages (Bosnian, Serbian, Croatian), as well as the major European languages (English, French, etc.) in order to present the multifaceted role of dervish orders, *ṭarīqas*, associations, *abis*, guilds, etc. She then sets out her starting points for explaining

the socio-economic role of these organizations and their part in the diffusion of Islam in Bosnia (or, for those who prefer, 'Islamization' of Bosnia). We discover early on that Aščerić-Todd does not intend simply to rehearse the familiar list of factors to explain this 'Islamization'—Bogomilism, Patarenism, the Bosnian Church, Bosnia's geographic and 'spiritual' position, the quarrels among Christian communities in the western Balkans, weak church organization, etc. The author intends, instead, by drawing on an imposing number of primary sources (*waqfnames*, *defters*, etc.) and secondary sources, to demonstrate the greater relevance of the Sufi-dervishes in the Islamization processes. That is not to say that she simply ignores the other factors mentioned and their academic proponents, but that her main emphasis is the Sufi-dervishes, their networks of *ṭarīqas* and *tekkes*, and their involvement in the system of endowments (*waqf*) by which their associations were founded and sustained.

By viewing Bosnia's late medieval and early Ottoman history from this perspective, the author skilfully shifts attention from the usual question of the identity of the population to another important question: the spiritual (and also economic) profile of organized groups (in this case, the dervishes and their orders) who interacted with the population, became part of it, and effected what we now call 'Islamization'.

The author shows that dervishes and their organizations, on the basis of previously established *waqfs*, built *tekkes* that were initially local. Of course, *tekkes* were largely spiritual institutions but, as endowments, had from the start concrete social and economic dimensions. Aščerić-Todd describes how Ottoman authorities gave dervishes land. The dervishes were among the earliest *timar* holders, and in practice responsible for improving the *timar* system in Bosnia. Founding *waqfs* and building mosques and *tekkes* in locations important for transport and communication prepared the way for future towns and cities. In this way crafts and trades were started, and the local population recruited into them became in the process civilizationally encompassed by the new Ottoman order.

What also facilitated the spread of *tekkes* in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and indeed later, was that Ottoman administrators and officials in Bosnia themselves commissioned the building of *tekkes*. Aščerić-Todd mentions Isa-beg Ishaković, Iskender-pasha, Gazi Husrev-beg (who built a *hanegâh* [*khānaqāh*]) and others, and explains their role as patrons of *ṭarīqas*. She shows that the process of establishing *waqfs* and *tekkes* was gradual and effected gradual changes in Bosnia's economy, transportation, religion and culture.

If *tekkes* and *hanegâhs*, that is, the *ṭarīqas* with their *taṣawwuf*, represented inward or spiritual factors which enabled Islam as believed and practised by Bosnian dervishes to take hold, then the guilds may be said to have contributed further to the economic dynamism of the towns and cities in Ottoman Bosnia. Ines Aščerić-Todd presents the structure which underpinned development of guilds, their 'command' hierarchy, the business ethics and moral conduct of their members in their transactions, and their 'trans-ethnic' character. Of course, the guilds looked after their members' economic interests too but, if I understand Aščerić-Todd well, *futuwwa* or the tradition of adhering to the Sufi code of honour, generosity and courage, was also of crucial importance to the way in

which the guilds carried out their responsibilities, interacted among themselves and with others, and to their activities in general. The author shows in this way that the firm structure of Sufi *ṭarīqas* had its outward, external expression in the structure of the guilds.

Since the *ṭarīqas* and guilds exercised not only great economic influence, but also religious and political influence, the Ottoman state was present and involved in them in various ways in order to protect its many interests. Aščerić-Todd explains that the different *ahi* corporations functioned in a practical symbiosis with guilds and vouched for them, while at the same time *ṭarīqas* or Sufi orders were affiliated with guilds. This, she argues—among other factors—had a decisive impact on the formation of Bosnian Muslim society in the fifteenth and sixteenth century.

The part of the study addressing the question of the Hamzevis is important. In my view, this is the best written study on the Hamzevis so far. It clearly demonstrates that the Ottoman state was highly vigilant and sensitive to anyone who in any way tried to disrupt or undermine the established relations among the recognized *ṭarīqas* or between the state and the *ṭarīqas*, or between state and *ahi* corporations, guilds, etc. There is not much data to support the view that the Hamzawis were doomed because of a particular theology that they had developed, or because of a ‘wrong’ *‘aqīda* or a lethal syncretism that they espoused. The author’s main argument is that the Hamzawis represented a powerful symbiosis of a Sufi order and guilds. Their ‘sin’ in the eyes of the state was that Hamzevi dervishes and their shaykhs were creating a system of guilds and *ṭarīqas* which ran in parallel to the system that the Ottoman state recognized, supported and used to its various advantages. According to Aščerić-Todd, the Hamzevis acquired their subjectivity ‘by criticising the existing social order’. Their ‘social teachings’ had an impact in the towns of Zvornik and Tuzla in northeast Bosnia. Furthermore, their leaders thought that the ulema were not acting in accordance with their *‘ilm* (knowledge), meaning that they did not care about or challenge social injustice. The author argues that in terms of their social engagement the Hamzevis were following the general Malami-Bayrami tradition of leading a humble life of self-denial. The ever watchful eye of the state found ‘fault’ not so much in their teachings as in their setting up a parallel system of guilds and Sufi structures.

This review can hardly exhaust the rich content of Ines Aščerić-Todd’s study. In a fresh and creative way, it reveals the dynamics of the spread of Islam in Bosnia over the course of about 160 years. Its greatest strength is its commitment to an objective approach to interpreting concrete historic processes. It would be good to have this study translated into Bosnian (Serbian, Croatian). In any case, future discussion of the spread of Islam or Islamization in Bosnia will not be possible without taking into account the well-argued views and interpretations in this book.

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